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S E R M O N

Preach'd before the Right Honourable the

L O R D - M A Y O R,

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A L D E R M E N,

A N D

C I T I Z E N S o f L O N D O N,

In the Cathedral Church of St. *PAUL*,

On SATURDAY, *June 11. 1743.*

Being the Anniversary of His MAJESTY's Happy
Accession to the Throne.

By *NATHANIEL COLLIER, M. A.*

Vicar of CROYDON in Surrey.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. and H. PEMBERTON, at the *Golden Buck*
against St. *Dunstan's* Church in *Fleetstreet.* 1743.

Willimott Mayor.

Tuesday the 21st Day of June, 1743. and
in the Seventeenth Year of the Reign of
King GEORGE the Second, of Great
Britain, &c.



IT is order'd, That the Thanks of this
Court be given to the Reverend Mr. NA-
THANIEL COLLIER for his SERMON
preached before this Court, and the Liveries
of the several Companies of this City, at the
Cathedral Church of St. Paul, on Saturday
the Eleventh Instant, being the Anniversary
of His Majesty's happy Accession to the
Throne; and that he be desir'd to print the
same.

M A N.

ROM. XI. 33.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

THE great Design of the Apostle in this Chapter, is to set forth the wonderful Mercy and Wisdom of God's Dispensations towards *Jews* and *Gentiles*; in reciprocally making the Unbelief of the one, the Occasion of bringing over the other to the Faith of Christ.

Our Saviour had himself commanded *the Gospel of his Kingdom* to be preached first among the *Jews*; and upon their obstinate Refusal of it, to be carried to the *Gentiles*. But *St. Paul* here tells us, that the present Rejecting of *them* was not intended to be final; nor the Receiving of *these* an Argument, that God had utterly cast away his People: For that the Favour shewn to the *Gentiles* should at last, through the wise Counsel of God, become the Occasion of provoking the *Jews* to Jealousy; and reducing them to the Faith, which they at first had rejected: As the casting off of the *Jews* had also, through the Wisdom of God's Providence, been made the Occasion of calling the *Gentiles*. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all, ver. 32.

God was pleased to suffer all the World, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, to fall into a State of Unbelief or Disobedience, that he might make his Power and Good-

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ness better *known*, in rescuing them all out of it; and that he might magnify his Mercy, in reducing them all to the Belief and Acknowledgment of the Truth.

This is that *Mystery* the Apostle speaks of at Verse 25, which justly raises our Wonder and Astonishment: When we observe how wisely God brings about the gracious Ends of his Providence, by Means unlikely to produce them; how graciously he displays the Wisdom of his Counsels, in bringing Good out of Evil, and making the Sins of Men redound at last to the Glory of his Mercy and Grace. Well may we cry out with the Apostle in my Text, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*, by which he is thus able to convert all things to the Honour and Glory of his Name, and make his severest Judgments conclude at last in Mercy! *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

Which Words, you see, by their Coherence with the Context, are spoken by way of Praise and Admiration of that wise and particular Providence of God, which brought about the Conversion of the *Gentiles* by the Unbelief of the *Jews*; and has herein laid a Scheme, if I may be allowed so to speak, for converting at last the whole World, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*. Which being to be effected in *the Fulness of Time*, by such Means as are above the Reach of any human Understanding; and therefore may be consider'd as a Specimen of the secret and wonderful Operations of the Almighty, in all his other Dispensations; will give me Occasion to treat of the amazing Intricacies of Divine Providence in general; which governs the World in such a manner, as is an evident Proof of the Wisdom of his Counsels, and at the same time leaves the Wit of Men at a loss to comprehend the Methods of his working: which so far interposes in all
human

human Affairs, as to overrule them to the best and wisest Ends; but leaves us in the dark, as to the Manner of bringing them to pass. So that after the nicest and most diligent Enquiry into the Ways of Providence, we must at last confess the Shortness of our Sight; and, when we find our Understandings too shallow to fathom *the deep things of God*, can do no more than cry out in the Words of my Text, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom, &c.*

In which Words there are two Things plainly implied, very proper for our Meditation:

I. That the Ways of God's Providence, and the Wisdom of his Counsels are of such a Depth, as not to be fathom'd or found out by any human Understanding.

II. That these Intricacies of Divine Providence are however a proper Subject for our Praise and Admiration.

I. That the Ways of God's Providence, and the Wisdom of his Counsels are of such a Depth, as not to be fathom'd or found out by any human Understanding. And this will appear by several Considerations;

1. If we consider the infinite Superiority of the Divine Understanding above the Capacities of Finite Creatures: That God is intimately acquainted with all the hidden Powers of Nature, which, tho' they may produce no more than their natural and necessary Effects, are yet very often surprizing unto Men, because they know so little of the Causes from whence they spring. And if we are so much in the dark, when Providence confines his Acting to the natural Powers of the Things which he has made; how much
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more may Human Reason be put to a Non-plus; when he goes out of the common Road, and brings about his secret Purposes by Means which have no natural, much less visible Tendency to produce them; but only as he is pleased to overrule them by those outward Circumstances, that are under the Guidance of infinite *Wisdom and Knowledge?*

The Knowledge of God is that Attribute of the Divine Mind, by which he perfectly comprehends the Nature of all Things, even before they are; with all their Powers, and Qualities; and Circumstances: By which he dives and penetrates into every Cause, and sees and knows it's Disposition and Aptitude to produce such or such Effects; so as that *all things*, even the secret Thoughts of Men's Hearts, lie *naked*, dissected and open at once to his View, without Confusion, Doubt or Mistake.

The Wisdom of God is that Perfection or Attribute, by which he considers and is acquainted with the Respects and Relations of Things one to another; their Harmony or Opposition, their Fitness or Unfitness to such and such Ends; by which he infallibly disposes and guides Things to the best Ends and Purposes; by which he makes, and governs, and administers all things in *Number, Weight, and Measure*, with a Skill that is not subject to Error or Disappointment.

Now it is by virtue of these Perfections, that God so disposes of Things from Time to Time, and puts second Causes into such a Method and Subordination, as to bring to pass in his due Time those Events, which *his Hand and Counsel determined before to be done*. And therefore the *Unsearchableness* of God's Judgments or Determinations, and the Difficulty of tracing out the Ways of his Providence, is in my Text resolved into *the Depth of his Wisdom and Knowledge*; which is such,

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as leaves the highest Attainments of any Human Understanding in Ignorance and Darkneſs.

"We are not at preſent," as an ingenious Writer obſerves, "in a proper Situation to judge of the Counſels by which Providence acts; ſince but Little arrives at our Knowledge, and even that Little we diſcern imperfectly; or, according to the elegant Figure uſed by St Paul, *we ſee but in part, and as in a glaſs Darkly.*" There is oftentimes ſo great a Diſtance between the Cauſe and the Effect, that our Faculties are too narrow and weak, our View of Things too ſhort and imperfect, to diſcover the Connexion between them. But every thing to God is always preſent, and his all-ſeeing Eye takes in at once the whole Compaſs of Nature: Whence it is, that he brings about his wiſe Deſigns by Ways and Means above our Comprehenſion, becauſe they are *far above out of our Sight.* The Secrets of Providence are therefore ſecret, becauſe they are the Workings of Providence, of a Being infinitely ſuperior to Men; and flow from the Exerciſe of thoſe Divine Attributes, whoſe Perfection it is, that creates the Difficulty of comprehending and finding them out. *Such Knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for finite Underſtandings, it is high above the reach of any human Counſel; we cannot attain unto it.*

And therefore the Pfalmiſt, ſpeaking of that gracious and miraculous Providence, that conducted the Children of *Iſrael* through the miſt of their Enemies, and delivered them from the Snares that were laid for them on every Side, and brought them in Safety to the promiſed Land, expreſſes himſelf in ſuch a manner, as implies the Difficulty of finding out the Manner of his Working: *Thy Way, ſaith he, is in the Sea, and thy Path in the great Waters, and thy Foot-ſteps are not known,* (Pſal. lxxvii. 19.) For *as a Ship paſſeth over the Waves*

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Waves of the Water, (they are the words of Wisdom, Chap. v. 10.) and when it is gone by, the Trace thereof cannot be found, neither the Path-way of the Keil in the Waves; even so must human Reason confess itself at a Loss, when it attempts to trace out all those entangled Mazes and Labyrinths, wherein the Divine Providence puzzles the Wit of Men: And when it has tired itself in the Search, must at last acknowledge what God himself tells us by his Prophet, Isai. lv. 9. that as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are his Ways higher than our Ways, and his Thoughts than our Thoughts. But,

2. *The Depth of God's Wisdom and Counsels will appear still more unsearchable, if we consider, that God is pleased many times to bring about the wise Purposes of his Counsel, by Ways and Means in all human Appearance unlikely to produce them, or perhaps seemingly contrary thereunto. Now Man being, as I have already hinted, no further qualified to judge of Things, than as they are the Effect of natural Causes which are clear and obvious; how should he understand the Designs of Providence, when it acts as it were behind a Veil, and produces Events, which seem to have but little Coherence with, if any Dependence at all upon, the Means by which they are brought to pass?*

For he that has all Nature at his Command need not, neither does he, confine himself to any one certain or settled Method of Acting; but shews his Sovereignty and Dominion over all, by the Variety of Instruments and *Ministers* which he makes use of to *do his Pleasure*. He many times loves to cross the Expectations of Men, and to check the Presumption of human Enquiry, by throwing Difficulties in their Way, which serve for the Exaltation of his *own* Power and Wisdom,

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Wisdom in surmounting them; *that he may do his Work, his strange Work, and bring to pass his Act, his strange Act.* * We are ignorant and short-sighted Creatures; but God comprehends at once the whole Chain of Causes, and over-rules them as he seeth fit, according to the *good pleasure of his will*: But always with this Design, to display the Wisdom of his Counsels, and the Glory of his Grace in the Event, though we cannot fathom the Means. And though he takes a Compass, like the Windings of a *River*, which to Men may seem improper and unnecessary, because it delays the Refreshment which flows from his Presence; yet is it only that he may convey the Influence of his Goodness, and extend the Effects of his Bounty to greater Numbers, and at last return with larger *Streams to make glad the City of God.*

'Tis true, we cannot comprehend or unfold the Mysteries of his Providence till they are compleated; because we cannot see *the Work of God from the Beginning to the End*: We cannot discover the Wisdom of his Counsels, while he keeps our Understandings in Suspence by the Intricacies of his working: but in the Conclusion we always find, that all his Dispensations are Holy, and Wise, and Good; and though *Clouds and Darknes* are round about him, yet that *Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Throne*, (Psal. xcvi. 2.)

There are none who have made any, though it be but a slight Observation upon the Affairs of the World, but must have met with Instances enough to confirm this Truth; and to make them acknowledge, how often Providence has brought about his wise Ends by very unlikely Means; magnifying his Mercy and Grace towards *them that fear him*, and shewing forth his Justice and Truth in the Punishment and Confusion of

* Isai. xxviii. 21.

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the Wicked and Disobedient, when things have been brought to such a Crisis, as has plainly discovered the Interposition of a superior Power, so as to make Men stand *amazed*, as well at the wonderful Disappointment of the One, as at *the Strangeness of the Salvation* brought to the Other.

We need not travel into foreign Climates, we need go no further than our own Nation, for an unexceptionable Proof of these Observations. And every one here present, who has heard what has been already said, I persuade myself, will be before-hand with me, in the Application to the happy Occasion which has at this Time brought us to the House of God, to give Thanks for His Majesty's Accession to the Throne of these Realms, as upon this Day. And they that recollect, how many signal Providences have concurr'd to the quiet Establishment of the Protestant Succession in His Majesty's Person and Government, from it's first Foundation, as it was laid in the late Happy and Glorious Revolution, (wherein this Renowned City bore so laudable a Part) through the many changeable and shifting Scenes, and divided Interests of Power, Ambition, Faction, Party, and blind Zeal, down to this Auspicious Day; and how wonderfully the different Views and discordant Passions of designing Men have been secretly and silently over-ruled, to unite in Duty and Affection to the Person and Family of our present most Gracious Sovereign now set over us, will be forced to acknowledge *the Finger of God* in all these Dispensations, tho' the secret Steps of his Providence are not to be traced out, or accounted for by any certain Rules of human Wisdom and Foresight. But

Besides this, whereof we ourselves have had Experience, the Scripture abounds with Examples to this Purpose;

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Purpose; one or two whereof it may suffice just to mention. And here

The Case of *Joseph* is so very particular and extraordinary, thro' all the Circumstances of his Life, thro' the several Steps of his Sufferings and Advancement, that it strikes our Minds with a wonderful Idea of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness: which made Use of the Envy of his Brethren, as a Means to raise him to that Honour and Dignity which they designed to prevent; of the false Accusation of his Mistress, to render his Virtue the more amiable and conspicuous; and took Occasion to exalt him to the highest Glory and Power in a great Kingdom, by first laying him under *Bonds and Imprisonment*. *The Archers*, as his Father *Jacob* expresseth it, *Gen. xlix. 23, 24. sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and bated him; but his Bow abode in Strength, and the Arms of his Hands were made strong by the Hands of the mighty God of Jacob*. Who likewise had all along, thro' this puzzling Vicissitude of Joy and Affliction, of adverse and prosperous Fortune, an Eye to the Support of his own People in the *Time of Dearth*, in Remembrance of his Promise to *Abraham* his Servant.

Our Blessed Saviour, of whom *Joseph* was a Type, is a no less wonderful Proof of the Wisdom of God's Providence, and of the unsearchable Riches of his Grace, in bringing Good out of Evil, and turning even the Sins of Men to his own Glory: while we consider the Treachery of *Judas*, and the Malice of the *Jews* in putting Jesus to Death, as the only Expedient to save the World, as the necessary Means to accomplish the Redemption of all Mankind. An unlikely Thing, you'll say, that *through Death the Devil that had the Power of Death should be destroyed*; and that his and our Enemies should be conquer'd, by

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that very Conquest which they had gained over him ! But thus it was ; and the same Dispensation that presents to our View an offended God reconciled to Men, leaves us in Astonishment at the Method by which this Reconciliation was made. This is the most remarkable, this the kindest Providence we can consider ; fuller than any other of Love and Condescension, fuller than any other of Power and Wisdom : And indeed all the other Blessings of Providence which we enjoy, are no more than the Fruit and Effect of this.

But the same Divine Goodness, the same Almighty Power, the same adorable Wisdom appears in God's inferior Dispensations, tho' perhaps not in so strong a Light : The Touches of his Hand must be acknowledged in the Disposal of every the most trivial Event, tho' perhaps the Strokes may be so fine, as to be scarce discernible by a human Eye. And when we observe strange Effects flow from common Causes, mighty Things brought to pass by little and trivial Instruments, wise and good Ends effected by seemingly contemptible Means : When we consider, how *all things work together for good to them that love God** ; how often a little Loss in the final Issue of things is productive of great Gain, and how frequently a present Disappointment proves a necessary Step to a future Advancement ; we must be unreasonably perverse, if we do not acknowledge that God sitteth above, and governs the World, and disposeth of all Events *according to the Counsel of his Will* ; we must be stupid and blind, not to see and *know, that this is thy Hand, and that thou, Lord, hast done it.*

3. It is to be consider'd, as a further Proof of the Weakness and Insufficiency of any human Understanding, to search out the Depth of the Wisdom of God's

* Rom. viii. 28.

Counsels,

Counsels, and the Secrets of his Providence; that those Accidents, which because of their Uncertainty are not subject to the Discovery of human Knowledge, nor to the Guidance of human Reason, are yet always under the Inspection of God's All-seeing Eye, and entirely under the Direction of infinite Wisdom; and therefore he can, and does over-rule them as he pleases, thereby to bring about the wise Purposes of his Counsel.

As to Men indeed, there are abundance of Events contingent and fortuitous, that fall out at random, without any certain Counsel or Direction; or depending on the Will of Free-Agents, must be hid from the Knowledge of finite Understandings: But, in respect of God, there is nothing happens in the World which is not fix'd and determin'd, both as to the End and the Means. Infinite Knowledge cannot be ignorant of any thing past, present, or to come. He that hath a Window into every Man's Breast, cannot be excluded from their most secret Counsels: He seeth our Intentions before they are put forth into Act: He perfectly comprehends our Designs before they are brought to Effect; and that even better than we do ourselves, because he knows our Hearts better: which the Psalmist acknowledges in those Words of *Psal. cxxxix. 2. Thou understandest my Thought afar off, and long before it is conceiv'd.* For which reason *Solomon* tells us, that *the Preparations of the Heart in Man are from the Lord, Prov. xvi. 1.* And tho' *a Man's Heart deviseth his Way,* yet *the Lord directeth his Steps, ver. 9.* Not that he over-rules the Determinations of Men by any positive Act, so as to take from them the Freedom of their Wills; but only disposeth of Things without them in such a manner, and so orders accidental Occurrences, as to bring about his wise Ends by the willing

ling and voluntary Concurrence of Free Agents: But how he does this, we are at a loss to comprehend. His Operations are secret and invisible: And how then should Man, who can judge of Things no further than they lie open to his Senses or his Reason, be able to account for them?

X Indeed, when the Event is produced, we cannot but acknowledge that it is Wise and Good. But there are so many puzzling Circumstances intervening, so many secret and invisible Accidents crossing one another, and leading a human Enquirer into inextricable Mazes and Labyrinths, when we offer to trace the Ways of God's Providence, that we find ourselves utterly incapable of framing any exact or adequate Notion of them; and after our utmost Diligence in searching, are left in the dark, as to the Methods by which he bringeth his Counsels to pass.

Thus in the great Affairs of States and Kingdoms, though the Counsels of Men are employed, and are of great Use, to secure the Happiness of the People; yet how many contingent Causes are there, that may spoil the best-laid Design for the publick Good? And unless these Contingencies be directed by a steadier Hand than can be found among human Counsellors, the World must quickly fall into Anarchy and Confusion. And the Providence that governs and overrules the uncertain Wills and fickle Humours, the mistaken and mutable Interests of Men, which are perpetually shifting from one Point to another, to bring about those wise Ends which they never designed, or perhaps thought to oppose, must be acknowledged as much above the Comprehension, as the Contrivance of human Wisdom.

Particularly, in the great Events of War between contending Powers on Earth, How often does the Provi-

Providence of God remarkably interpose, and mock the Weakness of human Counsels, by making uncertain Contingencies, perhaps little and trivial Accidents, decisive of the Quarrel; as by them it casteth the Victory on the unlikely Side? Whereof we have Instances enough in History, if we knew of none that have happen'd in our own Times; which yet it were an easy matter to point out. And this is the Reason of Solomon's Observation, *Eccl. ix. 11. I returned, and saw under the Sun, that the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong — nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding — but Time and Chance happeneth to them all*; meaning, that the Event of Things does not always happen according to the Power and Probability of second Causes and Means: For that such Accidents, as no human Wisdom could foresee or prevent, but which are under the Guidance of God's secret Providence, many times give a Turn to the usual Course of Things, and force the most cunning Politicians, the stoutest Soldiers to confess, that *the most High ruleth in the Kingdoms of Men.*

And hence it is, that among other Questions which God puts to *Job*, to convince him of his Ignorance in the Secrets of Nature and Providence, he poseth him with this; which is applicable to our present Purpose, *Job xxxviii. 22, 23. Hast thou enter'd into the Treasures of the Snow? Or hast thou seen the Treasures of the Hail, which I have reserv'd against the Time of Trouble, against the Day of Battle and War?* The Meaning of which is, that the Providence of God doth sometimes interpose, to determine the Events of War, by governing the Seasons and the Weather; and by making the Snows and Rains, *the Winds and Storms* to fulfill his Word, and to carry the Victory to which Side he thinks fit.

How

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How much has been owing to these Causes, for the Successes of her Winter Campaigns; the Renowned Princess, to whose Interest every good *Englishman* is most firmly attached, will, I make no doubt, with Gratitude acknowledge: And all her Friends will join with her, in the Praise and Thankfulness therefore due to that Righteous Providence, who hath so graciously and visibly espoused her Cause.

These and such-like extraordinary and remarkable Incidents extort a Confession of an All-wise Providence interposing. But we must not think that God does not concern himself in Cases of inferior Observation, because he does not shew himself so openly. For our Saviour expressly tells us, that *a Sparrow does not fall to the Ground without Him*; and that *the very Hairs of our Head are all numbered*, Matt. x. 29, 30. And if such trivial things are not beneath his Notice, How can we suppose, but that all the Ways of the Children of Men must be *in his Hands*, and that *he pondereth all their Goings*? There are Signs enough of his Presence to be seen, though he conceal his Face from our Sight. So that the Things, which as to outward Appearance may seem to happen by Accident or Chance, do not come to pass without his Appointment or Permission, and are the Result of the deepest Counsel and greatest Goodness: However it may be above the Reach of any human Understanding to find out the secret Methods of his Operation, and the imperceptible Influence he hath upon second Causes; or to give any Account, what Ends he may have in View, when, as a Judge, who sitteth on high above us, and thence surveys all his Creatures at once, *he putteth down one, and setteth up another*. *

X But as we shall probably have a clearer View of all the Dispensations of Providence, which at present *are*

* Psa. lxxv. 7.

bid

hid from our Eyes, when our Capacities come to be enlarged in a Future State; it will better become us to admire and praise, than to pry too curiously into that, which we cannot in this State of Imperfection comprehend.

And this brings me to speak something,

II. Of the second Thing implied in the Words of my Text, *viz.* That the Intricacies of Divine Providence, tho' they are not to be comprehended by our finite Understandings, are however a proper Subject for our Praise and Admiration. And this I gather from the Surprize and Astonishment with which the Apostle expresseth himself: *O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God!* By which Wonder and Amazement, he gives us a better Idea of the unsearchable Depth of God's Counsels and Decrees, than if he had express'd it in a more positive and declarative Form of Words.

And there is Reason enough for us to admire and praise those Dispensations of the Almighty in his Government of the World, which exceed our Understanding to explain or comprehend, both with regard to God and to Ourselves.

I. With regard to God, as they give us a magnificent Idea of the Divine Perfections. It is natural for the Mind of Man to wonder at that, which it cannot frame a just Notion and Conception of, in the Works of Art: And how much more Matter of Admiration must there necessarily be, both in the Works of Nature and Providence, which are the Effects of the Wisdom and Skill, not of any Human, but the Divine Artificer! How is our Understanding lost and bewilder'd, when we consider the excellent Order, and amazing Variety of the Things about us; the Beauty and Regularity of the whole Creation, or the harmonious Correspondence of the several Parts of it! But we should be thought to have a very slight Sense of the Greatness and Glory of him that made and preserves all these Things, if we could deny him the Tribute of Praise

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and Adoration, which he thereby lays as it were a natural Claim to. *The Heavens*, saith the Psalmist, *declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work*, Psal. xix. 1. And if, in the Words of the Roman Orator, “When we see the constant Motion of the heavenly Bodies, and the established Order of the Stars, and all things corresponding with, and depending upon each other, in such an admirable Harmony, as shews a Wisdom vastly superior to all that we can exert in the Discovery of them; we should overlook that Wise and Intelligent Mind, which disposes and governs them, we should not deserve the Name of Men.” If we should be silent, *when we consider the Heavens, the Work of his Fingers, the Moon and the Stars which he hath ordained* * : *If we should hold our Peace*, “when we observe the determinate and uniform Motions of all around us, and how they are govern’d by stated Laws, in unchangeable Order, and constant Regularity,” *the Stones would cry out*; the mute Part of the Creation would testify against us, and condemn our stupid Blindness and Insensibility.

Methinks when a Man considers this seriously, (and it well becomes every Man to consider it) he can hardly forbear breaking out in Language like that of the Psalmist; *O Lord, how manifold are thy Works! in Wisdom hast thou made them all; the Earth is full of thy Riches*, Psal. civ. 24. When we behold and consider *the Works of the Lord*, how can we chuse but join with *Elihu*, in Admiration of his excellent Greatness thereby set forth, and Acknowledgment of the Narrowness of our Capacities to understand them, in Words like those which we find, *Job xxxvii. God doth great things which we cannot comprehend; for he saith to the Snow, &c. (ver. 6, 10—14, 19.) —Hearken unto this, O Job; stand still and consider the wondrous Works of God.—Teach us what we shall say unto him; for we cannot order our Speech by reason of Darkeness.* All that we can say is only that we are ignorant; and when we have

* Psal. viii. 3.

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searched to the utmost of our Capacities, we must at last conclude, *Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in Power, and in Judgment, and in Plenty of Justice*, ver. 23.

But the same Depth of Wisdom that appears in the Natural, is visible in the Moral World; in disposing of human Affairs, in governing the Actions of Men, and ordering of all Events, so as to raise to himself a Monument of Praise from his Creatures: When they consider the Largeness of that Understanding, which knows how to bring Good out of Evil, and to turn the Sins of Men to his Glory; to serve the wisest and best Ends by weak and contemptible Means; to *take the Wise in their own Craftiness*; and to make use of the Follies and Disorders of some, for the Manifestation of his Goodness and Kindness to others.

Upon such an Occasion, *Elihu*, in his Vindication of God's Dispensations with regard to *Job*, will furnish us with Words of Praise and Admiration, *Job xxxvi. Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: He is mighty in Strength and Wisdom. He preserveth not the Life of the Wicked, but giveth Right to the Poor. He withdraweth not his Eyes from the Righteous: but with KINGS are they on the Throne, yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are EXALTED. He covers their Head in the Day of Battel, and subdueth all their Enemies. Behold, God EXALTETH by his Power: Who teacheth like him? Who hath enjoined him his Way? Or who can say, Thou hast wrought Iniquity?* From whence he concludes,—*Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the Number of his Years be searched out.*

Eliphaz speaks of him in the same Strain of Wonder and Amazement, *Job v.* with regard both to the Natural and Moral World; *Which doth great Things and unsearchable, marvelous Things without Number; who giveth Rain upon the Earth, and sendeth Waters upon the Fields; to set*

up on High those that be Low, that those which mourn may be exalted to Safety. He disappointeth the Devices of the Crafty, so that their Hands cannot perform their Enterprize: He taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness, and the Counsel of the Froward is carried headlong, and turns to their own Ruin and Destruction.

And as the Consideration of God's Dispensations in the Government of the World with regard to himself, will naturally excite our Admiration of that Supreme Being, whose Power and Wisdom manages all Things; so in Reason it ought to create in us the highest Veneration for him, and the strongest Sense of Gratitude towards him, when we consider,

2. What further Reason we have to praise and admire the Secrets of his Providence with regard to Ourselves; as they are temper'd with infinite Mercy and Goodness to us, as we are made Partakers of the greatest Benefits, from his wise Disposition of Things both in the Natural and Moral World. And this is so evident, that Heathens have acknowledg'd, that "all the Parts of the World are
 " so well constituted, that they could not be more convenient for Use than they are; and therefore that he
 " ought not to be counted for a Man, who is not moved
 " to Gratitude by the beautiful Order of the Stars, by the
 " pleasing Vicissitude of Day and Night, by the grateful
 " Mixture and Contemperation of the Seasons, and by all
 " those Things which are so bountifully produced for our
 " Use and Benefit:"—As by the Variety of Creatures he has made to serve us; by the wise Division of Men into several Ranks and different Orders; and by the Distribution of his Gifts of Wisdom and Learning, Riches and Honour, Strength and Power, in such a manner, as to maintain a continual and successive Dependance of one upon another, for the better Government of the World. *In much Knowledge, saith the Son of Sirach, the Lord hath divided them, and made their Ways diverse; some of them bath*

bath be blessed and exalted, and some of them bath be sanctified and set near himself; but some of them bath be cursed and brought low, and turned out of their Places, Eccclus xxxiii. 11, 12.

But all these things silently proclaim the Praise that is due to that governing Providence, who *maketh Poor and maketh Rich, who bringeth low and lifteth up*; to that understanding Mind, who directs all things to his own Glory, and the general Good of his Creatures; who *giveth us Rain from Heaven and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness*; who *openeth his Hand, and satisfieth the Desire of every living Thing.*

And *Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous Works*; for the Share that we of this Nation in particular have had, in his manifold Mercies; for the Mercies of his natural Providence, and for those of *his Grace in Christ Jesus*; for his Mercies to us as Men, for his Mercies to us as a Nation, for his Mercies to us as Christians; for his gracious Protection and watchful Care over this Church and Kingdom, by which we have been hitherto preserved and secured in the full Enjoyment of all our Civil and Religious Rights and Privileges; and for the comfortable Prospect of the Continuance of all these Mercies, under the wise Government and gracious Administration of His Majesty King GEORGE, as on this Day *set over us to be King for the Lord our God, and to do Justice and Judgment* * for his People.

Blessed be his Name, who hath so often interposed in our extreme Danger, and hitherto defeated the Machinations and Designs of all His, and Our Enemies; and hath raised up a mighty Salvation for us, in the Person and in the House of his Servant *David*, against the Attempts of all that *have evil Will at our Sion*, and blasted the Counsels of every *Abithophel* that has thought to disturb our Peace. Whosoever considers the Greatness of these Blessings, will not be backward to acknowledge from whom

* 2 Chron. ix. 8.

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they proceed; or to pray for the Preservation of His Majesty's Person, Family and Government, (under whom they are held, and by whom we trust they shall be transmitted to our latest Posterity) *that no secret Conspiracies, nor open Violences may disquiet, much less shorten his Reign.* And knowing the special Interest we have in God's general Providence, and how often he hath consulted and provided for our particular Benefit, by Arts and Methods which we ourselves could never have directed to such gracious Ends; we shall be disposed, if the Sense of our Duty prevails, to render him that Love and Admiration, which is the Lesson we are naturally taught, in Acknowledgment of these distinguishing Favours, besides those that are common to us with the rest of his Creatures, and which call upon us to join in the harmonious Consort of Praise and Obedience due from the whole Creation: When we reflect on the secret Influence, and hidden Operation, the Maker of all Things exerts upon all, for the Benefit of all: When we consider, by what imperceptible Ways and Means he conveys the Spirit of his Nostrils to support them in Life and Health, and how wonderfully he conceals the Manner of his Working, tho' he be so near to *every one of us, that in him we Live, and Move, and have our Being,* Acts xvii. 28. With so great Reason does the Psalmist, in Contemplation of God's wonderful Works and merciful Providence, cry out; *Great is our Lord, and of great Power, his Understanding is infinite,* Psal. cxlvii. 5. With so great Reason does the Apostle in my Text break forth, in that thankful and passionate Admiration of that abundant Wisdom and Goodness, which he could not comprehend; *O the Depth of the Riches, both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out!*

And thus having finish'd the Two Heads of Discourse implied in my Text, give me Leave now to conclude the whole with an Inference or two from what has been said.
And,

I. We

1. We may hence learn a Lesson of Humility, and *not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think:* But seeing how blind and ignorant we are, when we come to search into the Intricacies of Divine Providence, to think so *soberly*, as to acknowledge our Insufficiency to understand or comprehend them. If we take upon us, upon so short and imperfect a View as we have of Things, to censure or call in question the Wisdom or Goodness of God's Dispensations, we do in truth but expose our own Folly and Weakness. By being thus *wise in our own Conceits*, and *above that which is written*, we forfeit all manner of Pretensions to true Wisdom; whilst we pretend to greater Knowledge than is consistent with this present State of Darkness and Imperfection, and vainly "apply
" our Measures of Regularity to Matters, of which we
" know neither the Antecedents nor the Consequents, the
" Beginning nor the End."

Our Prospect is too dark and confused, to be able to distinguish the real Excellencies and Beauties of those Things which lie at a Distance round us. And this should check our Presumption in pronouncing too peremptorily concerning them. "For it is to be consider'd," as an ingenious Writer hath it, "that Providence in it's
" Oeconomy regards the whole System of Time and
" Things together; so that we cannot discover the beautiful Connections between Incidents, which lie widely
" separated in Time; and by losing so many Links of
" the Chain, our Reasonings become broken and imperfect. Thus those Parts in the Moral World, which
" have not an absolute, may yet have a relative Beauty,
" in respect of some other Parts concealed from us; but
" open to his Eye before whom, Past, Present, and to
" Come, are set together in one Point of View: And
" those Events, the Permission whereof seems now to accuse his Goodness, may in the Consummation of things
" both magnify his Goodness, and exalt his Wisdom."

2. From

2. From what has been said, we may learn how much it is our Wisdom to submit ourselves with a chearful Resignation to God's Providence; to acquiesce in his Disposal of our Affairs, and to be well satisfied with whatever Condition he is pleas'd to assign us, with whatever Affliction he is pleas'd to try us: Because the Maker of the World best knows how to govern it; our Concernments are in the wisest and safest Hands; in his Hands whose Mercy is infinite, and therefore he will never be wanting in a fatherly Care over those that put their Trust in him; whose Wisdom is unsearchable, and therefore he knows how to bring about the best Ends by what Means he thinks fit; and to turn the worst Evils we can suffer or fear, into the greatest Good; Trouble into Comfort, Confusion into Order, Grief into Joy; Sickness, Pain and Misery into Health, Happiness and Glory; so as that *all things shall at last work together for good to them that love God.*

And though we cannot at present very well reconcile the Inequalities of God's Dispensations, and the intricate Steps of his Providence, with our Apprehensions of his Wisdom, and Justice, and Mercy; yet we may be sure there will come a Time, when these Clouds and Darkness shall be scatter'd; all these Perplexities unravell'd, and all the Riddles of God's Providence laid bare, and open to our Understandings; when *his Judgment shall break forth as the Light*, and the *Righteousness* of all his Dealings *as the Noon-day.*

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FINIS.

